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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [OSCE](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: ODIHR AMBASSADOR STROHAL'S VISIT TO RUSSIA DELAYED  
AGAIN

Classified By: Minister-Counselor for Political Affairs Alice G. Wells  
for reasons 1.4 (b/d)

¶1. (C) In a September 26 meeting, MFA OSCE Counselor Denis Goncher told us that ODIHR Ambassador Christian Strohal's visit to Moscow, planned for the first week of October, had been delayed due to "scheduling difficulties." Goncher admitted that the MFA had not yet issued Strohal a formal letter of invitation, but are still anticipating a visit in October. Regarding the worry that this may affect the deployment of long-term observers, Goncher informed us that the Central Election Commission (CEC) had already met with Head of ODIHR Elections Department Gerald Mitchell to begin discussions. He assured us that Russia would invite international observers "according to its international obligations," but declined to elaborate.

¶2. (C) EU diplomats informed us that fourteen letters have been sent requesting talks for Strohal in Moscow, but only one has been answered -- and that one "ambiguously." An Austrian diplomat told us that the Russians have talked about "conditions" for election observers, but will not specify what these might be. He also said the GOR had blamed delays on the need for the CEC to announce election dates and on the formation of a new government, but that Russia continues to postpone substantive discussion on election observation. Despite the lack of cooperation from the GOR EU diplomats still have hope that Strohal's visit could take place the week of October 8.

¶3. (C) Comment: In meetings with CEC's Chairman Churkov, the Ambassador has urged the GOR to work with ODIHR and the chairman indicated he was amenable. While the question of international observers continues to be exploited by Russian politicians (with LDPR leader Zhirinovskiy the latest and loudest to proclaim observers a violation of Russia's dignity), we believe the GOR will cooperate with ODIHR, but only grudgingly and to the minimum extent required by its OSCE commitments.  
Russell